

The Friedman Conference Center, Part II July 31

Earlier this month, on July 19, the Center for Cryptologic History posted an article about the origins of the Friedman Conference Center. This space was not always associated with William and Elizebeth Friedman. For 18 years after the completion of the Operations Building in 1957, the space was simply known as “the auditorium.” It was, after all, the lone auditorium on the entire NSA campus, which only included a handful of buildings at the time.



Newly memorialized entrance to the William F. Friedman Auditorium in May 1975.

The auditorium served as a place for briefings, lectures, award ceremonies, and other events that drew a large audience. One such lecture on the World War I Zimmerman Telegram entitled “The Influence of ‘C’ Power on History” (“C” being “cryptologic” - a play on Alfred Thayer Mahon’s 1890 work *The Influence of Sea Power on History*) was delivered by William Friedman to the Crypto-Mathematics Institute in September 1958. Friedman officially retired in 1955 but continued as a special consultant to the director and an author of cryptologic history. His talk captivated the audience who already viewed him as a legend. This lecture would form a portion of Friedman’s Lectures on Cryptology, which he recorded and the Agency later published. The lectures are declassified and available on NSA.gov.

It is not surprising then, that the day after Friedman’s death on November 12, 1969, an NSA employee suggested that the auditorium be named in his honor. Using formal suggestion channels, Bob Cefail advocated for the memorialization of the auditorium citing the importance of Friedman’s efforts to train new generations of cryptologists. In particular, Cefail stated: “I teathed on his *Military Cryptanalysis* works in the late ‘40s, as a GI studying with Lambros Callimahos, and helped on Callimahos’s revision of those works in the early ‘50s, starting as a civilian in AFSA’s Technical Division under Mr. Friedman.”

Unbeknownst to Cefail, NSA leadership wrangled over this suggestion for five years, undecided over whether individuals, particularly civilians, could (or should) be memorialized in this semi-public way. The Agency's senior leadership from each major directorate took an official vote on the matter, but it deadlocked into a tie. DIRNSA Lew Allen put the matter to rest by approving the action in November 1974 and requesting a formal ceremony to mark the occasion.



D/DIR Mr. Buffham and Mrs. Elizebeth Friedman unveil the bust of William Friedman during the memorialization ceremony on 21 May 1975. Lambros D. Callimahos and Abraham Sinkov watch in the background.

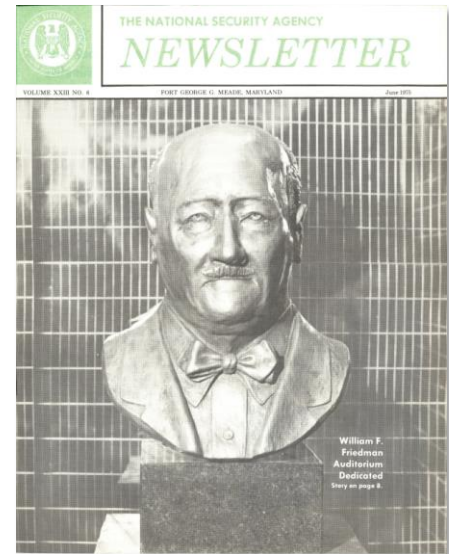
The dedication ceremony occurred on 21 May 1975, on what would have been the Friedmans' 58th wedding anniversary. Family, former colleagues, and elite figures from the Agency's past and present attended to remember their hero. Originally planning to preside over the ceremony, General Allen was instead called to Capitol Hill to testify to the newly formed Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (i.e., the Church

Committee). In his place, Deputy Director Benson K. Buffham (also a member of the World War II Arlington Hall days) stepped in as the master of ceremony.

During the event, Friedman's colleagues remembered him as a monumental figure in American cryptology. Friedman's wife, Elizebeth (who had originally introduced him to the field and was a legendary figure in her own right), would later remark that she was appreciative of the Agency's efforts to remember her deceased husband. In the month following, the *NSA Newsletter* revealed that over 400 people attended the memorialization ceremony.

Elizebeth would pass away five years later in 1980. By the 1990s, it became clear to NSA historians and others who were researching the early cryptologic work of the U.S. Government, that even though Elizebeth had never worked for NSA, her role in her husband's development as a cryptologist was critical to his success. It was his infatuation with both her and her skepticism in hunting for a hidden cipher in William Shakespeare's First Folio that led him to a career in cryptology.

During the period between World War I and II, both Friedmans worked as cryptologists for the US Government – she as a codebreaker for the Navy, Coast Guard, and Federal Bureau of Investigation chasing down Prohibition-era bootleggers and Nazi spies in Central and South America and he as the lead cryptologist for the US Army Signal Intelligence Service slowly building up a civilian-based cryptologic organization. Therefore, the auditorium was renamed for both Friedmans and in 2002 the entire OPS1 building was dedicated to the cryptologic power couple.



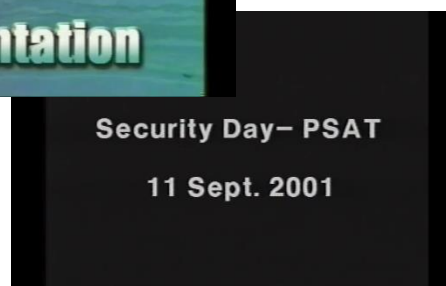
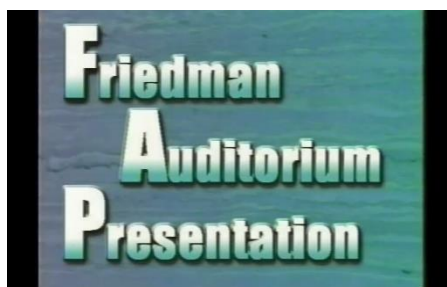
The cover of the June 1975 NSA Newsletter featuring the bronze bust that was on display in front of the auditorium. Today, the Friedman bust is on display in the National Cryptologic Museum.



The Friedman Auditorium during a Travis Trophy ceremony in the late 1970s.

Since the time of its memorialization, the Friedman Auditorium has been the place for countless meetings, ceremonies, conferences, lectures, and town halls. In addition to hosting NSA senior leadership, other special guests included U.S. presidents, vice presidents, secretaries of defense, directors of central intelligence, directors of national intelligence,

leaders in private industry, Holocaust survivors, World War II Native American code talkers, and even an archivist of the United States. The Center for Cryptologic History held its first Symposium on Cryptologic History in the Friedman Auditorium in 1990. And on September 11, 2001, many employees remember where they were when they heard the news of the terrorist attack: sitting in the Friedman Auditorium listening to a briefing on NSA's new Perimeter Security Anti-Terrorism (PSAT) plan.



Screenshots of the Perimeter Security Anti-Terrorism Plan briefing given in the Friedman Auditorium during the morning of 9/11 prior to the news of the terrorist attacks.

This physical place is an important part of NSA's institutional memory. While the 2018 renovation of the auditorium into the Friedman Conference Center no doubt enhances the physical and technological features of the space, let's not forget the figurative historic fabric that lies beneath, and the two individuals for which it is named. Its significance might be best summed up by a former chief of the NSA History Office who advocated for the auditorium memorialization in the 1970s. He expressed then that it was important for NSA to have a "collective sense of cryptologic history, of heritage, of traditions... and heroes - which fuse into an intangible yet very real part of the organization, or more precisely, of what the organization *means* to those who are a part of it." The Friedman Conference

Center means a lot to the Center for Cryptologic History as we hope it does to you.

Sources: Transcript of the Zimmerman Telegram lecture by William Friedman; "How the Friedman Auditorium did NOT get its Name!" by Bob Cefail in Cryptolog, 1990, 3rd issue; Cryptologic Spectrum, Winter 1974.

502 captions: photo 1: Newly memorialized entrance to the William F. Friedman Auditorium in May 1975. Photo 2: The Deputy Director and Mrs. Friedman unveil the bust of William Friedman during the auditorium memorialization ceremony on 21 May 1975. Photo 3: The cover of the June 1975 NSA Newsletter which ran a full story on the auditorium memorialization. Photo 4: The Friedman Auditorium during a Travis Trophy ceremony in the late 1970s showing the audience. Photo 5: Screenshots of the Perimeter Security Anti-Terrorism Plan slides shown in the Friedman Auditorium on the morning of 11 September 2001.